The Life of Malcolm X: Part 2

The message of Malcolm X

Malcolm X soon became the most visible national spokesman for the Black Muslims. As the voice of the organization he was a speechwriter, a philosopher, and an inspiring speaker who was often quoted by the media. His debating talents against white and black opponents helped spread the movement's message.

At this time in the United States there was a major movement for racial integration, or bringing the races together in peace. However, Malcolm X and the Black Muslims were calling for racial separation. He believed that the civil rights gains made in America amounted to almost nothing. He criticized those African Americans who used nonviolent methods in order to achieve integration. Malcolm X called for self-defense in the face of white violence.

Malcolm X urged black people to give up the Christian religion. He preached that the high crime rate in black communities was basically a result of African Americans following the lifestyle of Western, white society. During this period Malcolm X, following Elijah Muhammad, urged black people not to participate in elections. These elections, the movement believed, meant supporting the immoral political system of the United States.

In 1957 Malcolm X met a young student nurse, Betty Jean Sanders, in New York. She soon became a member of the Black Muslims. They were married in 1958, and she became Betty Shabazz. The couple eventually had six daughters.

Losing momentum

By 1959 the Black Muslim movement had moved into the national spotlight. Racial tensions were reaching a boiling point, and white Americans grew fearful of Malcolm X and his message of black supremacy. By 1960 Black Muslim membership had grown to more than one hundred thousand.

As the movement reached its peak, some observers felt that there were elements within the Black Muslim movement that wanted to oust Malcolm X, or force him from office. There were rumors that he was planning to take over leadership from Elijah Muhammad and that he wanted to make the organization political. Others felt that the personal jealousy of some Black Muslim leaders was a factor. Malcolm X was upset by rumors that Elijah Muhammad was seducing young women in the organization.

On December 1, 1963, Malcolm X stated that he saw President John F. Kennedy's assassination as a case of "The chickens coming home to roost." Soon afterward Elijah Muhammad suspended him and ordered him not to speak for the movement for ninety days. On March 8, 1964, Malcolm X publicly announced that he was leaving the Nation of Islam. He said he was starting two new organizations: the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and the Organization of Afro-American Unity. He remained a believer in the Islamic religion.

An international focus

During the next months Malcolm X made several trips to Africa and Europe and one to Mecca, a city in Saudi Arabia that is the holiest city of the Islamic religion. Based on these trips, he wrote that he no longer believed that all white people were evil and that he had found the true meaning of the Islamic religion. He changed his name to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.

Malcolm X announced that he planned to take the black struggle to an international audience by putting black people's complaints against the United States before the United Nations (UN). For this purpose he sought aid from several African countries through the Organization of Afro-American Unity. At the same time he stated that his organizations were willing to work with other black organizations and with progressive white groups in the United States. Together, these organizations would work on voter registration, on black control of community public institutions such as schools and the police, and on other civil and political rights for black people.

Malcolm X began holding meetings in Harlem at which he discussed the policies and programs of his new organizations. Then, on a Sunday afternoon, February 21, 1965, as he began to address one such meeting, Malcolm X was assassinated.

Since his death Malcolm X's influence on the political and social thinking of African Americans has been enormous, and the literature about him has only grown.

Works Cited

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